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ABSTRACT

Just as voluntary agencies cannot function adequately without help from the government, the public system has failed to function adequately without the assistance of voluntary agencies. Public and voluntary resources should be organized into a coordinated accountable system that would assist families with the wide range of services necessary for their physical, social, intellectual and emotional development. Black families, in particular, will need more social services than the government alone can offer in the next ten years. A comprehensive, interrelated system of public and voluntary agencies would provide these families with the social services they need to develop and maintain their strength, and their dignity. (Author/EB)

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THE VANISHING DICHOTOMY: THE PUBLIC VS. THE PRIVATE FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK FAMILIES

Jane D. Edwards

The history of family services in this country has evidenced a sharp dichotomy between the public and private sectors with the public services being only concerned about man's physical needs and the private, more concerned about his emotional needs. In failing to recognize the interrelatedness of these needs, we have fallen short, in both sectors, in contributing to man's growth in the total life experience. While public assistance to meet financial need has expanded, public programs have not sufficiently dealt with other social problems. Man does not live by bread alone. Demoralization and disintegration of individuals and families are prevented in part by having economic essentials: places to live, enough to eat, and an opportunity to work. But spiritual and emotional well-being must also be recognized as basic human needs. Our programs, public or private, must safeguard the strengths of family life by providing financial essentials, with incentives to prevent dependency whenever this is possible, to restore those who are dependent to a high degree of self-sufficiency, and to assist families with a wide range of services necessary for their physical, social, intellectual and emotional development. Neither the public sector nor the private sector with mutually exclusive resources can be relied upon to adequately meet family needs. The dichotomy should vanish into one comprehensive interrelated system of public and voluntary providers.

The public delivery system is unpredictable and shifts with political ties, going back and forth from centralization to decentralization, growing more complex and multi-purposed with self-servicing management presenting an impersonal face to its constituents. No matter how new and dynamic the program seems at the onset, it soon becomes bureaucratic in operation with officials practicing more caution than creativity and innovation, adhering to routinized operations, impersonal

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policies and inflexible rules, instead of personal judgment on the basis of individual and special needs.

The private family service agencies have been just as questionable and worse in many respects, lacking in sufficient accountability and yet relying on local voluntary contributions to deal with a myriad of social problems, problems selected by Boards or staff rather than by communities, shifting problems which seemed "only financial" to the public agencies. Most Black applicants for services were thus shifted. Voluntary agencies wanted to deal only with psychiatric problems. As private funds diminished, voluntary agencies, without ongoing evaluations of their programs as to whether they were needed or achieved what was expected, sought government contracts. Basically they were asking for public support while continuing to serve the same clientele of their choice. Black families were still left out. It was not until voluntary agencies had literally no private funds to fall back on that they accepted almost total support from the government and those clients only the government was serving. So we see Black families served inadequately or not at all. For example, many voluntary agencies, only to stay alive, increasingly accepted Black children into foster care and Black families in OEO programs. The voluntary Delivery System often referred to as a private system is really not private inasmuch as most of the agencies are at least 75% supported by the public--by gifts, grants, fees and government contracts.

Just as voluntary agencies cannot function adequately without help from the government, the public system has failed to function adequately without the assistance of voluntary agencies. In New York City, in the public system, the separation of Income Maintenance from Case Intake and Management was to provide for a more efficient financial assistance program without neglecting other family problems. As a member of the Task Force on Social Services to AFDC children,

sponsored by the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York City in 1977, I found that while the financial assistance program improved, with backlogs reduced and checks going out on time, social service problems have been virtually ignored in many instances and inadequately met when acknowledged in most situations. The Income Maintenance Division, whenever social problems are recognized, refers to OCIM (Office of Case Intake and Management) where needs are supposed to be assessed and clients referred to appropriate community agencies for help. However, clients are not usually referred for help, and if referred, car fare is not provided. Most OCIM workers are not professionally trained and by and large do not have directories of social services to rely upon, nor could they use them anyway because they are bogged down with heavy caseloads and paper work. OCIM should be able to provide referral linkage for direct services for families covering short-term crisis and supportive counseling, marital, family and adolescent counseling. A variety of modalities should be available, including individual and group treatment. OCIM workers should include health related services, social services, recreational, cultural, education and vocational programs. This is not the case now.

But where are these services and programs to which to refer families? The voluntary agency by its nature has the means for experimentation, creativity, pilot and demonstration programs and with philanthropic and government funds, can be developed to provide these services in a more reliable, innovative, and responsive manner than is possible for the public agency. With government funds, philanthropic and corporate giving, fees for services where appropriate, and income from other fund raising, the voluntary agencies can shape up to become more credible and durable. By using a marketing mentality with sound budget practices and evaluation of performance of services, they are in a better position to provide a wide range of family services and money from either private or public sources.

The voluntary agencies can show a keen personal interest in learning about the needs, perceptions, preferences and satisfactions of its constituents and can develop systematic information collection procedures such as consumer panels, telephone and mail surveys. Voluntary agencies can encourage their constituents to submit inquiries, complaints, suggestions, opinions, and create consumer committees as advocates to facilitate more appropriate services. Without political interference and legal constriction, they can then sift the incoming information and take positive steps to adjust organizational policies, procedures and services for the clients' benefit.[1]

The voluntary agency, of course, must be held strictly accountable to providers of funds and consumers of services. Black families need many more social services than the government can prepare to offer in the next ten years and even then, quality services would be unlikely; but by providing some support to voluntary agencies, such as they are providing to corporations and universities, many agencies can be prepared right now, to offer more preventive services, consumer education, family planning, nutrition education, supervised drug treatment, day care and day treatment with transportation and intensive mental health services.

Black families will benefit from the vanishing dichotomy between the public and voluntary delivery system as the Government assumes its responsibility for a coherent delivery structure within which all human services, public and voluntary can effectively operate. The President's proposed Welfare Reform, if followed through, calls for a close working together of public and voluntary sectors to strengthen families with cash benefits and economic incentives, jobs in the public and private sector, training for skills for these jobs and government funds to

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[1] Philip Kotler, Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975, Chapter 3.

voluntary agencies to provide high quality services to all families in need. Black families would have more services, options, benefits and opportunities. Families with working fathers would not be denied welfare, and aid would not be lowered until the working father earned over a certain amount, $8,400 per year, and thereafter, he would get tax relief credits up to $15,600. Single mothers would have more freedom in choosing child care services, being able to deduct child care expenses. It will help stabilize families when parents are unable to cope because relatives will have an economic incentive to care for children. The tremendous deficiencies in the present welfare system are criminally destructive. Young children with mental problems are not being treated. Instead of helping them to get into the mainstream of life, institutionalization is their destiny. Young Black boys and older men overdosed on drugs or alcohol are left lying in the streets in our inner cities, walked over by passersby and passed by local police just as if they are subhuman.

The entire welfare system, including mental health services, is poorly coordinated. Public and voluntary resources should be organized into a coordinated accountable system. Provider-Consumer Councils could help to identify needs and help plan a comprehensive system of services in given areas or communities.

In New York City, a special task force on restructuring the delivery of social services in New York City recommended that instead of the present fragmented, ineffective centralized program for human resources in New York City, that each locality have an "Action Center" which contracts with voluntary agencies for the purchase of services on behalf of district residents subject to the commissioner's approval.[2] Community Board would enable citizens to participate meaningfully in service needs and assessment and evaluation.

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[2] Task Force on New York City Crisis, 225 Park Avenue South, New York, August 15, 1977.

The voluntary system did not heretofore serve the Black family except on token basis. The public system half-heartedly took care of physical needs. Together they offer the most hope for serving Black families quantitatively and qualitatively in the future. Neither system has considered the Black family's and Black extended family's need for cohesiveness and solidarity. They have not allowed Black families to have a voice in their own destinies, not to mention control. They have not been tuned in to our needs, our aspirations and goals and they have underestimated, if not completely overlooked altogether, our strength. And considering our strength, how much further ahead might we have been today if we had not suffered the delays and set backs, the frustrations and put downs for well over 100 years? Yet, strength abounds! Black men and women in large numbers are entering many new fields--finance, engineering, architecture, politics. We are exercising our rights when able to do so by participating actively on planning boards, school boards, community councils, and in political organizations.

Through the years we have heard a great deal about the instability and disorganization of Black family life, the reported so-called negative effects of the female-headed household on male children and the catch-all culprit, the "broken home." We know, however, that when economic problems and income are held constant, Black families are less disorganized and unstable than other families and research has indicated that single-parent families per se, male or female headed, do not affect either personality or success.[3] This can be looked at more closely later on in relation to race and socio-economic status as more women of all races choose to be single parents.

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[3] Jerold Heiss, The Case of the Black Family, A Sociological Inquiry, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1975, p. 131.

It is remarkable that Black families, no matter how down, or how long they have lived from day to day in a dehumanizing environment, still have hopes for themselves and for their children for a higher plane of living. A study of 43 underclass families in Central Harlem revealed that after generations of being recipients of public assistance from time to time, and despite delapidated housing over the years, all had worked from time to time and all subscribed to the importance of education, good jobs and nice homes for their children as adults. What they needed most of all was help with many other social and family problems and help with understanding the educational, legal and welfare systems.[4]

When given assistance and support by voluntary agencies, especially Black agencies and Black staffed agencies, with government help, Black families have been able to develop their strengths, to coalesce, to take more responsibility for solving their own problems and for controlling their destinies. Look how our Black foster parents with our help as a voluntary agency and government aubsidies have reached out to adopt 1,000 children, some six at a time.

Spence-Chapin's satellite agency in Harlem, Harlem-Dowling Children's Service, along with other agencies there--Wyltwyck, the Harlem-YMCA, Hale House and Harlem Interfaith Counseling Service--have helped Black inner-city families in Harlem to mobilize their resources, to accept and utilize help from other family members or other families in the community, and to take advantage of the services offered by these agencies. The services are mostly preventive and they help families to cope and deal with the systems. These services are not now offered by the public system, except to a small extent on a purchase of service basis. I know most from personal experience about strength in Black families and how voluntary and public systems working together as <u>one</u> can develop that strength to benefit Black children.

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[4] Juan Gordon, <u>The Poor of Harlem: Social Functioning of the Underclass</u>, Office of the Mayor, July 31, 1965, p. 129.

First to be considered in any family service system is prevention--helping families before they reach the state of having to consider foster care or adoption for their children. A few voluntary agencies with grants from foundations and income from investments stemming from gifts, have used that income to serve families in crisis situations, relating to physical or mental illness, evictions, loss of employment, fires and other sudden unforeseen circumstances. Many children have been kept at home who might otherwise have been neglected or placed in foster homes. And families have been helped to utilize their strengths and to take advantage of other services. Hopefully, the government will soon support the development of more such programs before parents are allowed to fail. However, if we had more agencies concerned about Black families, and more staff calling upon and reinforcing the strengths in Black families, voluntary agencies in partnership with government agencies, could find other families for children when their own parents fail. The economic situation in this country has caused a larger number of Black children to be available for adoption, more than the number of Black families in a position to adopt them. Low income levels accounted for the dearth in Black families able to adopt children. However, for years too numerous to mention, Black families have reached out to nurture, rear, and adopt both informally and formally, Black children previously known or completely unknown to them.

Over a million Black children are still being reared by grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives. Also, millions more reside with relatives for shorter periods of time as a means of providing care for them while their parents work. While urban Black families do not have as many extended kinship ties as rural Black families, they develop close friends who operate the same as relatives and the informal absorption of families and individuals by relatives and friends is still one of the most viable institutions for the survival and advancement of Black people.[5]

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[5] Robert B. Hill, Informal Adoption Among Black Families, National Urban League Research Department, Washington, D. C., p. 78.

However, family services are needed to strengthen these families. Recently, the City of New York has financially supported voluntary agencies to study and serve kinship families. With City and State funds going directly to the families to provide for room, board, clothing and medical expenses for the children and money for support services to the agency. AFDC funds, instead of foster care funds, would not only be less, but would be discouraging. Moreover, AFDC would not include friends as recipients of the professional supportive social services needed. These services have helped some of the informal arrangements to develop into formal adoptions.

Most agencies in the public and private sectors did not look to foster parents to adopt Black children until fairly recently, despite efforts of the National Urban League and the Adopt-a-Child program in New York City over twenty years ago. White-managed agencies lacked the knowledge and commitment necessary for success in the placement of large numbers of Black children in adoption, despite the availability of Black adoptive homes. Some concerned agencies went about their Black Adoption Programs without involving the communities, in control, direction and planning for Black adoptions. Even in communities where they actively recruited adoptive homes, none was willing to surrender or even to share the control. Black communities resented their presence and were not very cooperative. One reason for this lack of commitment to Black adoptions was money. Middle class and mostly White families adopting children paid fees for agency administrative costs. It was not until the government fully supported adoptions, for the costs of child boarding care as well as for staff to do adoption home studies and placements, that agencies stepped up their Black adoption programs.

Spence-Chapin, with foundation grants, investment income, and government funds has been actively involved in Black adoptions since 1948, when the agency was first

incorporated. In 1962, we launched a tremendous Foster Care and Adoption Project, mostly for Black children, but other minority children were included. We called upon Black families in the inner city and suburban areas of New York City to assist in the project, and hundreds of Black families responded and came to accept young children who had been left in hospitals and shelters by young parents who were unable to cope or to provide. We went to all levels of the Black community, to housing projects in Manhattan, Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn, then to Black, heavily populated communities, such as Keyport, Red Bank, Matawan and Neptune, New Jersey and Lakeview, Roosevelt, Wyandanch and Amityville on Long Island, and we recruited families, trained them, placed young children in their homes and developed them into adoptive homes. Since then, over 3,000 children and their families have been served by Spence-Chapin. One third have returned to their natural and extended families with enabling social services, and another third have been formally adopted. The rest of our children in care are now returning to natural families or are in the process of formal adoption. Many have been informally adopted by families they have been living with since early infancy, and they should remain in these homes.

The success of this project along with government funds, more foundation grants and Andrew Bellingsley's inspiring study, "Children of the Storm,"[6] encouraged me to ask Spence-Chapin to establish a Black family and children's agency in Harlem in 1969, involving from the start the Harlem community in the control, direction and planning. And from the beginning, this agency was designed to become an independent agency in Harlem. It is completely separate from Spence-Chapin now, having all but formal autonomy. Autonomy is still the goal and will be accomplished

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[6] Andrew Bellingsley and Jeanne M. Giovannoni, Children of the Storm, Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, Inc., New York, 1972, p. 157.

within a year. We respect the Human Resources Administration of the City of New York and the State Department of Social Services for supporting us in this endeavor, which was approved by them at a time when money was short and agencies were being encouraged to merge rather than to spin off costly satellites. The authorities, however, recognized the social and psychological significance of Harlem having its own family and children's agency and hoped that more Black child adoptions would develop. This has certainly happened, as Harlem-Dowling outstrips most agencies in New York City in the placement of Black children in adoption. Adoptions of Black children by Black families tripled when government subsidies for children being adopted were provided. The strength of Black families and their love for the foster children was evident then from the first year of the government subsidy; over 100 Black children have been adopted each year by our foster parents and their associates. As pointed out in a study conducted by the U.S. Children's Bureau, a substantial increase in the adoption placements of Black children appears most likely to occur when the public Departments of Welfare in large cities play an active role in providing subsidies, in coordinating recruitment efforts, and in providing publicity and exchanges for all adoption agencies, voluntary and public.[7]

If H.R. 7200 in its original form becomes law, funds for preventive services to maintain stability within families can be provided with government support. Money will be provided for all states to subsidize adoptions and to provide related adoption social services. A tremendous national adoption exchange will bring families and children together from distant areas. Since ninety per cent of White children available for adoption are readily adopted without subsidies, this bill will mostly benefit Black families and children. With national support, voluntary agencies

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[7] Sandusky, Rea, Gallagher, and Herzog, Families for Black Children, Children's Bureau, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D. C., 1972.

assisted by public funds would be able to offer more and better services to Black families fostering and adopting children all over the United States. Caseloads can be kept at a level to enable workers to provide intense and enriched services. Moreover, voluntary agencies could then use private funds for non-reimbursable services. Adoption services could then continue even after legal adoption throughout the child's developing years as needed by the family. Government funds are not now provided for these services. The provision of more funds in the family service child welfare field will stabilize agencies and encourage more Black professionals to enter this field. This will, in turn, encourage racial pride and strong professional role models for families as well as strengthen Black families in the concept of Black consciousness and Black community cohesiveness.

In summary, the Public Welfare Delivery System can only be truly effective if it is concerned with all human services for all human beings, whether served by the public sector or the voluntary sector. It must continuously identify [illegible] services and resources the community lacks and must work endlessly for their development, directly and by contractual arrangement with voluntary agencies. Black families are strong, to be sure, but need social services to affirm, develop and maintain their strength, and their dignity. All families must be given the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

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